

*Looking for Gold* is the first solo exhibition for Sassy Park since recently graduating from the National Art School. The theme originated from a recent artist residency undertaken in Hill End. Park spent the month of May in Murray's Cottage on Beyers Avenue, working in the studio, visiting the village and old diggings, and panning for gold, mostly in the company of kangaroos and magpies. On her first panning trip to Tambaroora Creek, with the help of local guide, Jhob Drinkwater, a gold nugget was found. Gold fever struck. By the end of the month, she dedicated her time between making work in the studio and panning for gold in the creek. The search for gold shapes much of the history of Hill End and Australia. Bernhardt Otto Holtermann and Ludwig Hugo (Louis) Beyers discovered the 'Holtermann Nugget' in the area in 1872. It is the largest single mass of gold ever found and with the fortune made from it, Holtermann set about to commission a photographic record of the people of Hill End. Using the Holtermann Collection of photographs as a reference point, Park created figures and vessel works in clay.

Ceramic objects have often been used to carry ideas of the souvenir and there is a permanence to ceramics that lets it live on through time. In figurative works, we recognise humanity, activity and emotion that suit the direct and honest qualities of the material. In this exhibition, *Looking for Gold* extends the literal meaning, becoming a metaphor for the elusive and vulnerable search for success and attainment whether it be in love, sport, fashion, art or social debate. The everyday things that influence Park are the subjects that find their way into her work. Her ceramic forms referencing a hyper-awareness to historical, material and social contexts engage the curiosities of gender, intimacy, and vulnerability. Deliberately playing with notions of value, ideas of fragility are investigated through concepts of scale, intimacy, and humour. For her it is the quotidian matters that need remembering and commemorating. The figures with their gestures, postures, and facial expressions draw on a deeper level of animated being. The small scale nature of these works draws the viewer in, to look more closely and engage with the object. Displayed together on a table or shelf, the figures and vases interact with one another, bringing an emotive energy to the work.

The residency in Hill End was made possible by the Bathurst Regional Art Gallery in partnership with the Department of Environment & Heritage NSW Parks and Wildlife Services.